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SUBJECT: FORUM FOR THE FUTURE: MINISTERIAL OPENING AND
CLOSING SESSIONS

1. (U) November 12, 2005; 9:00 a.m., Manama, Bahrain.

2. (U) Participants: G8 and BMENA Foreign Ministers

Speakers:
Secretary Rice

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Bahrain FM Shaikh Khalid Al-Khalifa
Moroccan FM Benaissa
UK Foreign Secretary Straw
Jordan Planning Minister Al-Ali
Russia Deputy Foreign Minister Saltanov

Peter Mulrean, Kirk Wolcott (notetakers)

3. (U) SUMMARY. The Ministerial Session of the second Forum for the Future, held November 12 in Manama, opened with statements from Secretary Rice and Foreign Ministers from the UK, Morocco, and host government Bahrain, noting progress made since last December's Forum and the need to continue working together to foster vital reforms throughout the region. The Secretary expressed the main theme of this year's Forum when she stressed the importance of partnership with civil society and praised the participation of 40 civil society representatives, compared to just five in last year's gathering. Jordan announced it will host the third Forum, scheduled for next year. And Russia, as the incoming G8 President, closed out the event by encouraging others to continue building on the reform agenda in the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) region, using proposals from this year's Forum as the way forward. END SUMMARY.

Bahrain FM Al-Khalifa

4. (U) Bahraini FM Al-Khalifa opened the meeting by stating that the Forum for the Future represents fundamental human values and that the objective of the gathering was to reaffirm support for reform throughout the region. Bahrain had made progress in political, economic and social areas and had included civil society in the reform process. To ensure the success of reforms, societies must recognize the importance of empowering women and respecting human rights. Acknowledging that every country has specific political and cultural circumstances, Al-Khalifa nonetheless called on all countries to do their utmost to move forward on these common objectives. Stability and peace are fundamental to progress, and reform is "on the move" in Iraq. He announced that Jordan had agreed to host next year's Forum for the Future conference.

UK FS Straw

5. (U) UK FS Straw stated that since change in the region would benefit all, it must be driven by all. There are three keys to ensuring the success of reforms: first, including civil society in the process; second, providing quality education to all citizens; and third, establishing inclusive government. Developments in the region over the past year represent a gradual shift towards democracy in the region. The issues on the agenda of the Forum would have been taboo for discussion only a few years ago. He stated his hope that the EU's Barcelona process would take concrete steps in support of these priority issues at the Ministerial meeting later this month.

Moroccan FM Benaissa

6. (U) Moroccan FM Benaissa stated that G8 and BMENA partners must move forward hand-in-hand on the full range of issues under discussion. Respecting countries, individual circumstances is important, but the Forum puts the individual at the center of reform efforts. All partners should take concrete reform steps, keeping the respect for human rights and the rule of law as the basis for action. The Democracy Assistance Dialogue (DAD) meeting in September and the

creation of Entrepreneurship Centers in Morocco (and Bahrain) are examples of the GOM's progress on BMENA initiatives over the past year. The region still suffers from violence and bloodshed, however, and regional disputes must be resolved.

The Secretary

17. (U) The Secretary expressed outrage and condolences to both Jordan and other countries that had lost citizens in the recent bombings in Amman. This serves as a reminder that there are those who have a very different vision of the future for the region than Forum participants do. There has been "tremendous expansion of liberty in the Greater Middle East" since the Forum in Rabat last year, including Palestinian and Egyptian elections and the people of Lebanon rising up to drive Syrians out of their country. The U.S. supports the people of Syria and calls for the release of detained opposition figures, including Kamal Labwani.

18. (U) Referring to underlying principles of democracy, the Secretary stressed that the road to achieving these is

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difficult, as America's own experience demonstrates. A partnership with civil society is important, as is demonstrated by the participation of 40 civil society representatives in this year's Forum, as opposed to five in last year's. The Forum should transcend differences and reaffirm the universal support for democracy. The people of the region are making this goal seem inevitable.

Closing Session

19. (U) Representatives from Jordan, as the host of the next Forum for the Future in 2006, and Russia, as the next holder of the G8 Presidency, made closing remarks supporting continuation of the reform process. Minister Al-Ali said that the Forum has gained momentum since its inception in 2004, most notably in the participation this year of a wide range of NGOs not permitted during the first Forum in Morocco, as well as the cooperative atmosphere of constructive dialogue that has developed between civil society and governments since then. To maintain this momentum, Jordan proposed to host an interim Senior Officials Meeting before the next Forum to examine progress on proposals put forward by the delegates in Bahrain.

10. (U) Russian Deputy FM Saltanov said his country would continue supporting the BMENA reform agenda. Two specific problems, however, need to be overcome to ensure continued progress in the future: first, unsettled conflicts, such as those in Iraq, Israel/Palestinians, and Lebanon/Syria; and second, the ongoing transformation of the BMENA region with respect to the wider globalization process. G8 countries should continue providing assistance, both financially and through a series of reform programs, such as those encapsulated in the Forum for the Future process.

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